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WAR SUFFERERS'
RELIEF BULLETIN

"Not to be ministered unto, but to minister"

July, 1945 — MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE — Vol. I, No. 5

Letter from Holland

The letter appearing on this page, received at Akron, June 18, brought to Mennonites in North America the first direct word concerning the impact of World War II upon the Dutch Mennonite churches. A second letter, received July 3, and a post card, received the same day the first letter arrived, bring further greetings and news from Holland Mennonites. They appear elsewhere in this issue of the Bulletin.

The heading of the letter printed below is: Middelburg, Holland, April 3. The explanatory note appearing at the end was prepared by the Relief Research Office at Akron. —Editor.

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

With great pleasure and gratitude we received your kind letter of January 30. This sign of brotherly interest and sympathy in our hardship has deeply touched us.

Since September, 1944, we have been without any contact with the greater part of the Mennonites still living under the German occupation. Only a small part of them, 850 of 45,000, are set free. We have sent a copy of your post card to the various Mennonite centers and hope to write you about their needs presently.

Churches in Zeeland

This letter is to inform you about three churches in Zeeland: Middelburg, Flushing, Goes. We are glad to say that among the members of these three churches there were no casualties, but the material damage is considerable. As you probably know from the newspapers, the dykes of Walcheren were bombed in October, 1944, and the greater part of our island was flooded. The centers of Middelburg and Flushing are still dry, so that the services on Sundays can take place as usual. The church of Middelburg had no damage, but at Flushing the building was destroyed in 1942. We do not expect to have a church of our own at this place for the next three or four years. This of course is a great handicap for us, as religious life is very difficult to maintain without our own center. But we cannot see our way to build a church, as there is a great lack of building materials now, and we are afraid that this will last for years. Houses and factories are more needed for the economical recovery of our country.

The church of Goes was also damaged in November, 1944. During the months immediately after the liberation it was impossible to have Sunday services there, but afterwards it was provisionally repaired and we could therefore have our service. New members were baptized in our own church for which of course we are very thankful.

Personal Needs

The personal needs of our members are very great. About ten per cent of them suffered more or less damage from the war. (Eight lines deleted by censor.) The food problem of the still-occupied part of The Netherlands will be very desperate. The story goes that they have lack of nearly everything, especially those living in big towns such as Rotterdam, Amsterdam, and The Hague. We do not know if you will have an opportunity to send food to that part of our country, but if you will do so

you might direct it to Flushing, in case the harbors of Amsterdam and Rotterdam are not yet suitable for unloading ships. We will do our utmost to help you in distributing any gifts you may be able to send.

We hope this letter will not give you the impression that our material needs are taking all our thoughts and strength. God has been our help in these days of trouble and He goes on strengthening us. More important than our needs is the opportunity He gives us to walk before Him in the land of the living.

May the Lord bless you all.

For the Elders of the Mennonites of Goes, Middelburg and Flushing,

(signed)
N. W. Van Dijen
M. de Boer
J. L. Diesch
A. H. A. Bakker

Explanatory Note

The three Zeeland communities referred to had a total of 347 members, plus 97 catechumens. Flushing, or Vlissingen as it is known in Holland, is a port opposite the Scheldt Estuary on Walcheren Island (Population 1937: 21,753). Its Mennonite congregation totaled 172 members (leden) and 40 catechumens in 1939. Middelburg (Population 1936: 18,378), also on Walcheren Island, is the capital of the province of Zeeland, with a Mennonite congregation of 138 members and 22 catechumens in 1939. The smallest Mennonite congregation of the three is at Goes (Population 1936: 9,605), located on the adjacent island of South Beveland. It had 37 members and 35 catechumens in 1939.

The signatures were rather difficult to decipher, but the following seem certain: A. H. A. Bakker from Middelburg, M. de Boer from Flushing, and J. L. Diesch from Middelburg. The fourth signature appears to be N. W. Van Dijen (?) from Goes.

The original post card, sent January 30, 1945, was addressed to the postmaster at Middelburg, who was requested to deliver it to the local Mennonite leader. We have been unable to locate a copy of this post card. Possibly no copy was made.

Notes from the Field

Child Feeding in Paraguay.—If you crave the feeling to create something from nothing, Paraguay is the place. Especially if you are conducting a feeding project. Every spoon, pan, table, and stove must be made to order or at least repaired. Then you must collect all of these "implements" from carpenters and tinsmiths and by wagon haul them to the newly built kitchen at Itacurubi. . . . Before beginning the actual feeding it is necessary to line up all of this equipment and in addition make a preliminary survey of children. Betty Keeney.

Nursing T.B. Refugees.—Just now we are in the process of preparing the patients for their transportation to a sanatorium in Yugoslavia. Our six plus patients along with those from Tolumbat will be included in a regular flight. However, this special group entails a great deal of extra planning in the way of supplies and medical personnel. To us who work with these patients it seems highly urgent to move them as quickly as possible into a more favorable climate. The daytime heat is most unfavorable for their recovery. It appears that it is a factor in the increase of pulmonary hemorrhages.—Helen Moser.

Our Relief Program in India.—A fairly extensive house-building and -repairing work has been conducted southeast of Calcutta. About fifteen miles out, at Champahati, some arrangements have been made for industrial work and a beginning effected. This has some promise but to be really effective should be conducted with some long-range plan in mind. There is also a small amount of free rice distribution and medical service conducted. The industrial and hospital work formerly conducted at Sonarpur has unfortunately been taken over by the government. I say "unfortunately" because they are not accomplishing what might be done with the setup available. Just now, Lawrence Burkholder is investigating possibilities in another badly affected area. This may turn out into something challenging. There are other possibilities and the work should easily develop sufficiently to use several more workers. Clayton Beyler is engaged with the housing work mentioned above, and Harold Sherk is occupied with office work at headquarters and negotiations with authorities.—S. F. Pannabecker.

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Thinking about Relief

"Now Our Brotherhood Is in Greatest Need."

From the beginning of the seventeenth century down to modern times, the Mennonites of Holland have been alert to the privations and sufferings of fellow Mennonites in many other parts of the world. This outreach of relief concern was so extensive that there are few Mennonites living today who have not at one time received assistance from the Dutch, either directly in the present generation or indirectly through persecuted and migrating ancestors. World War II, however, has reversed these precedents and today the Mennonites of Holland find themselves the recipients of relief.

It is to this long record of relief activity S. H. N. Gorter, vice-chairman of the Dutch Mennonite Society, alludes when he writes in the letter printed in this issue of the Bulletin, "After having belonged in a previous period to those who could give, now our Netherlands brotherhood is in the greatest need itself." In these days it is pertinent for us to read again the story of Dutch relief ministration. In summary fashion we have endeavored to list below a chronological account, by no means exhaustive, of Dutch Mennonite relief efforts:

1567 (?)-1600

Assistance given to Flemish Mennonites suffering severe persecution and who were migrating to Friesland and other northern provinces in Holland and Germany.

1665

Large contributions sent to Hutterian Brethren in Hungary and Transylvania where suffering was intense as a result of persecution and the Turkish wars.

1671-1736

During this period the Mennonites in Switzerland were severely persecuted. In 1671, 12,000 guilders were raised in behalf of Swiss Mennonite refugees who had arrived in the Palatinate penniless. The following year substantial material aid was sent to Mennonites in Switzerland. Relief was brought to several hundred Mennonite families in the Palatinate in 1689 when an invading French army laid waste their communities. In 1710 an organization, known as "Fund for Foreign Needs," was formed among the Dutch Mennonites to provide for and assist more efficiently the many Mennonites from Switzerland and the Palatinate who had arrived in Holland and were migrating to America. "Fund for Foreign Needs" was active for almost a century.

1685

Funds raised to help persecuted French Huguenots after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

1713-1736

Aid sent to persecuted Mennonites in northwestern Germany and Lithuania.

1780 (?)

Funds collected and sent to Mennonites in East Prussia who suffered when their community was flooded.

1758

In response to a petition from Mennonites in Pennsylvania, funds were sent to assist Mennonites in Page County, Virginia, who were suffering from raids by the Indians.

1873-1880

Dutch Mennonites joined with the Mennonites of United States and Canada to assist the large group of Mennonites migrating from Russia to America.

1920-1925

Dutch Mennonites shared in the work of the American Mennonite Relief Administration in bringing relief to brethren in Russia during the famine following World War I.

1929-1930

Assistance given to Mennonites in Canada and Brazil.

(Sources consulted for information regarding the record of Dutch Mennonite relief were: Horsch, "Mennonites in Europe;" Smith, "The Story of the Mennonites;" Lehman, "The History and Principles of Mennonite Relief Work—An Introduction;" various issues of "The Mennonite Quarterly Review.")

MENNONITES EXTEND CHARITY

An interesting testimony concerning the charity of the Dutch Mennonites is contained in a letter written in 1660 by the civil authorities of Amsterdam to the government of Switzerland. This letter was written in disapproval of the persecution of Swiss Mennonites, and one reason advanced was the notable benevolences of the Mennonites. The letter said:

"The Mennonites (of Holland) are people which at no opportunity have failed to extend noteworthy charity toward the people of the Reformed faith. Only recently, when our brethren, the Waldenses, were so cruelly driven from their homes (by the duke of Savoy), they have in this city, simply upon our recommendation, contributed the sum of about 7,000 pounds in Holland money for the support of the afore-mentioned Waldenses."

Letter from Rotterdam

The following letter, received at Akron, July 3, was mailed at Rotterdam, June 12, 1945.—Editor.

Dear Brethren:

This week a ship is sailing from here to America and I wish to take the opportunity to send word of our welfare. Throughout this country we have passed through a most severe time the past five years, and the Almighty has submitted us to a hard trial. We are of course very thankful for liberation by the allied forces, but, nevertheless, we are in many respects living on the ruins of our former existence.

Destruction of Church Buildings

Our communities received heavy blows. As you will no doubt have heard, Rotterdom was first in turn; on May 14, 1940, the whole of the old city was destroyed by the German air force; also, our beautiful, old church, which you know so well, was entirely destroyed. Since that day we have gathered in small buildings and halls, of which we are now using the seventh. Four more Mennonite churches were destroyed in Wageningen, Flushing, Nijmegen, and Arnhem and many others heavily damaged. When and how these will be rebuilt lies entirely in the dark. Many of our members have been carried off as forced laborers or prisoners to Germany and a great number of them have died in the hell of the concentration camps; we have reason to fear that two of our pastors belong to the latter. A student of our Mennonite college died there and another, my son, Giesbert, was killed on command of the German authorities.

Present Needs

In material respect we went through a very difficult period, especially the past winter and this spring, when all of us were tormented by a constant hunger. In our communities, particularly in the western part of this country, a great many members deceased, especially old people. There still remains a heavy shortage of all kinds of living necessities, such as clothes, shoes, furniture, bicycle tires, etc. But notwithstanding all this, we have come through these horrible five years and in the majority of our communities a strong revival could be noticed. Seeing that this world disappointed and men showed themselves from such a bad side, there were a great many people who looked elsewhere for their consolation and returned to God, who did not withhold His blessing.

Plea for Assistance

I am writing you all this because I understand it will interest you. But also because I know, if at all possible, you will offer us your help. After having belonged in a previous period to those who could give, now our Netherlands brotherhood is in the greatest need itself. Bro. Lehman of Akron has been informed already about the southern part of our country which was liberated in 1943. We appeal to our personal friendship and relations since the years of our relief work—Canada, Brazil, Mexico, Paraguay—and the Mennonite Congresses. I address myself to you in the name of the ALGEMEENE DOOPSGEZINDE SOCIETEIT of which I am the vice-chairman. The headquarters of the Mennonite reparation work will be there. (Secretary: Mr. H. Craandijk, Amsterdam, 8 Corellistraat.) We feel sure that you will support us to the measure of your powers. I shall be pleased to supply you with any additional information concerning the actual position here, but for today I shall stop here.

Receive my hearty greetings, also from my wife, and be committed to the Lord with all yours. I sincerely hope to hear that you are all very well and that the same may be said of your communities.

With brotherly greetings, believe me,

Yours very affectionately,

(signed) Ds. S. H. N. Gorter.

POST CARD FROM HOLLAND

The following post card arrived June 18. It was mailed at Middelburg, April 20.—Editor.

Dear Brother:

We received your post card of January 20, 1945. We were very glad to read that the Mennonites of North America take such a warm interest in our circumstances. We write to you as representatives of the Mennonite churches of Middelburg and Flushing. We have transmitted your message to the other six churches in the liberated part of our country. Your offer for help is very welcome to us, and we gladly accept it. Many of our members are in great need, especially of clothes and shoes. With the same post we are sending you a more elaborate letter about the nature and the extent of our need. Peace be unto you and unto us all.

Yours sincerely,

(signed)

M. de Boer A. H. A. Bakker

Dutch Relief

Statement on War Relief

The following statement was prepared by the secretary of the A.D.S. as a memorandum of understanding regarding efforts on the part of American Mennonites to assist Dutch Mennonites re-establish their homes and churches. —Editor.

Since Bro. Gorter wrote his letter of June 12, the Algemeene Doopsgezinde Societeit—as you will remember, this is the organization of the Mennonite brotherhood in Holland—have made a beginning by organizing the relief work in behalf of our communities (congregations). A central committee (to which were delegated the treasurer and the general secretary of the A.D.S., was formed.

Furthermore a circular letter was directed to all our communities inviting them to provide full particulars as to the loss of churches, assembling houses and parsonages destroyed by violence of war. Estimations based on prewar value were asked for. The true costs of reconstruction cannot be estimated because of the absolute lack of materials and of the knowledge about prices.

Our communities were asked to inform us about individual cases to whom assistance should be given in money or in goods. It is doubtful whether any goods for relief can be found in this country. All stocks in every thinkable line were taken away by the Germans.

It is certainly to be expected that each community will try to supply its own needs and that of its members by its own means, but these possibilities must not be considered to be important.

The next step to be taken will be the organization of a general aid fund to be initiated by the A.D.S. To this end a collection will be held, and we have the expectation that we will not in vain apply to the liberality of our well-to-do people. Nevertheless, when we consider all damage done to our churches of Rotterdam, Wageningen, Flushing, Nijmegen, Arnhem, Aardenburg, and others, we feel sure that all means available in this country will not be sufficient. Therefore we are deeply moved by the generous offer from our American brethren, and we feel justified in accepting their support.

As soon as we know more particulars we will provide full information. We appreciate the value of a businesslike base to the support that will be granted. In the meantime, if there is a possibility to provide for the first material need, we recommend the sending of all kinds of goods, such as textile, shoes, beds, mattresses, and bicycle tires and tubes.

The address of our relief committee is with the General A.D.S. Secretary, Mr. H. Craandijk, Keizersgracht 726, Amsterdam (office address) tel. 32536 and 33151, home address, Corellistraat 8.—H. Craandijk.

Statement of Welcome

In the following statement the secretary of the A.D.S. officially welcomes the Mennonites of America to initiate relief work in Holland. —Editor.

The Algemeene Doopsgezinde Societeit (Mennonite Society) asked me to write to you in their name that they highly appreciate your intention to start your relief work in this country.

The needs are great and the means of support are almost failing.

We shall welcome the workers of your organization you intend to send and we are glad to put the buildings connected with our Amsterdam Church, Singel 452, at your disposal in order to establish your offices.

The Algemeene Doopsgezinde Societeit
(Signed) Dr. H. Craandijk.
Executive Secretary.

Contacts in Holland

Our first contact was with Dr. Jacob ter Meulen, chief librarian at the Hague Peace Palace, through whom we learned the present personnel of the Algemeene Doopsgezinde Societeit and the correct addresses of the society officials. This then required going to Amsterdam, which was again kindly enabled by the movement orders given us. We spent most of the two days with H. Craandijk, Keizersgracht 726, Amsterdam, the present secretary of the A.D.S., and with Dr. T. O. M. H. Hylkema, Frans van Mierisstraat 61, Amsterdam, who is the pastor of the Amsterdam Doopsgezinde church, and who is now actively engaged in relief service in Amsterdam under the Swedish Red Cross and the Netherlands Red Cross Help. Through these contacts we received a clear picture of needs and opportunities for relief throughout Holland and were assured of the full co-operation of the Doopsgezinde communities and congregations in such program of War Sufferers' Relief our Committee may be able to bring.—O. O. Miller.

Mennonites in Puerto Rico

In the Caribbean Sea, between the great Americas, there rests a plot of ground approximately thirty-five miles wide and one hundred miles long. On this island, known as Puerto Rico, one finds God's handiwork —nature's beauty—almost at its best. One almost feels that God put forth special efforts when making Puerto Rican sky, clouds, trees, flowers, and landscape. His prize creation, man, seems to have unusual difficulty to enjoy even the bare essentials of life. There are 1,869,255 people living on this plot of ground, according to the 1940 census. This means that there is one person per acre. I shall not attempt to list the many problems created by this condition and other conditions, nor is it my plan to even attempt a partial answer.

Do Mennonites Have a Place?

The great majority of the people living on the Island profess to be Catholic, with a Catholic cathedral in every town of any size. I understand that there are some twenty-five different Protestant groups who have set foot on the Island to promote God's cause here. Now, is there a place for the Mennonites in Puerto Rico? Should the Mennonites crowd in on this small Island also?

Our answer can be but in the affirmative when we know that there are thousands on the Island who do not get sufficient daily food, thousands who do not have a chance at making even a moderate living, and thousands who have physical wounds or other ailments but with no one to help heal them. There are 1,700 beds for tuberculosis patients when 9,000 beds are needed. Many rural schools are so crowded that they run them on half-day shifts, with pupils sitting on the floor and about half enough books to go around. A certain welfare officer was so short of personnel and had such a lack of funds that as many as 1,100 requests for help since 1942 have never been followed up. There are no sanitation facilities in most rural areas. Above all this, one can see a kind of look on many faces that expresses a desire to find a true purpose for living.

The Mennonite Mission

My hope would be, first of all, for the Mennonites to aid with the healing of many wounds, figuratively and literally speaking. These people need the help of service-minded church friends now. Not only would it be my hope to have the Mennonites help heal the open wounds but, at least in a small way, help make their contribution to the search for an answer to so many unsolved problems in Puerto Rico.

Besides that, I feel there is another reason why Mennonites should come to Puerto Rico. We, as a church group, like most other church groups, believe in the inspired Word of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This war, however, has brought to the foreground the fact that our church, with a few other churches, has somewhat of a different interpretation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We believe that Jesus meant what He said, in such passages as, "Love your enemies. . .," "Love thy neighbour as thyself," "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." These things are not only to be believed some great day in the future when conditions seem just right, but rather here and now. Even though we come short ourselves in following these commandments of our Lord, we feel called to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with our friends in Puerto Rico.—Harry Martens.

RELIEF FOR THE NEEDY

"It would take a hundred thousand men a hundred years to rebuild Puerto Rico!" Dr. Cordier's statement sounded rather ominous to us as we heard it expressed in a lecture at Goshen College, and it was rather with fear and trembling that we ventured into the work of this unit. Our two years' experience, if it has not proved the validity of that statement, has nonetheless convinced us that an immense job confronts us. Poverty, illiteracy, and disease, with their attendant results, are evident on every hand.

With this problem continually before us, we are pooling our various resources to try to meet the needs. Poverty cannot be overcome simply by the giving of charity; better agricultural practices, with subsistence crops grown at home, may be part of the answer. Education through lectures, health pictures, classes, and by example will help, we believe, in combating both ignorance and disease.

Such a challenge as Puerto Rico presents cannot be overlooked, nor can it be easily conquered. How much we accomplish will depend largely on the seriousness and purposefulness of our attitude. To do good to all men must be the basis of our approach; is Christ's way.—J. H. Hean.

Peace Notes

Gulfport Project Recognized

Members of the Mennonite C.P.S. camp at the Gulfport, Mississippi, public health project received considerable commendation for the excellent service they performed in the installation of sanitary facilities at Camp Wilkes, a summer camp for adolescents. The following excerpts have been taken from a letter written by E. P. Wilkes, director of the camp:

"The members of C.P.S. Camp 141 at Gulfport have just completed installation of water lines, sanitary facilities, etc., at Camp Wilkes, Boy Scout camp near Biloxi. They were on the job nearly two months and in all put in 288 man-days. The work they performed under the general supervision of Mr. Harold Martin, camp director, and Mr. Ed. Miller, foreman, was of the highest type.

"I found these men to be of the highest type and very capable workers, and the caretaker of the camp and his wife were high in their praise of their conduct while at work at Camp Wilkes. . . . Last year about 900 children used the camp and this year, with the addition of modern facilities, we expect a larger number. . . . I want to express thanks to your organization and to the men who have done this work."

A Future for C.O.'s

One national public welfare organization has advanced some ideas as to what C.P.S. men might do in their home communities in postwar days. The National Committee for Mental Hygiene said in their thirty-fifth annual report: "Under any conditions the services of this body of men, 1,800 in number, would be gratefully received, but in present circumstances their contribution is of inestimable value. This group . . . has drawn up for itself, as an outgrowth of its experience in mental hospitals, a Mental Hygiene Program. . . . The National Committee for Mental Hygiene is encouraged to hope that the interest shown by this group in the care of the mentally ill will not cease with the war's end. No one can deny that members of Civilian Public Service units have firsthand knowledge of conditions in our mental hospitals. Since they know whereof they speak their voice may well be hearkened to, and their influence in their communities may well break down the lethargy of the public in regard to present conditions in mental hospitals."

In the C.P.S. Offing

The future of the C.P.S. man is quite unpredictable. Recently several measures have transpired, and others are on the horizon, which will radically change the future of C.P.S. Before the month of June ended the Military Appropriations Bill rode through the House and Senate with the rider attached making it impossible for C. O.'s to perform foreign relief service while in C.P.S. The additional hope that a score of assignees from each administrative agency could secure discharges to perform foreign relief service is being delayed.

Partial demobilization of C.P.S. has still not gotten under way, and there are hurdles to leap before any discharges become effective. Congressman Winstead from Mississippi has introduced a bill asking that C.O.'s be retained in the camps and units until they attain the number of points required of servicemen for release. Patriotic organizations are bringing pressure to bear on Selective Service because C.P.S. men are to be discharged before servicemen from all branches of the armed forces are released. The future of the C.P.S. man is very indefinite.

Aims of C.P.S. Religious Program

In considering the spiritual life of the men in Mennonite C.P.S. the regional directors with the headquarters staff from Akron, at the Regional Directors' Conference in Chicago, June 9, drew up the following list of aims or objectives for the religious program in M.C.C.-C.P.S.: (1) To help men make everyday decisions in the light of the Christian commitment. (2) To help the men grow as individual Christians, so that they can be more helpful with other individuals. (3) To help men understand the importance of the experience rather than the form, but to realize the importance of the form and habit. (4) To have the men develop in a way acceptable to their own group. (5) To have "fruits" consistent with one's "faith." (6) To make religious language and habits meaningful. (7) We expect men to participate in religious services, as they would in a normal, permanent setup. (8) We want men to make new commitments, decisions for Christ—whether it be through personal work with individuals, or through silent or public commitments with a group. (9) We want group life to be as nearly as possible a Christian brotherhood.

I Listen to the Agony of God

I listen to the agony of God—
I who am fed,
Who never yet went hungry for a day.
I see the dead—
The children starved for lack of bread—
I see, and try to pray.

I listen to the agony of God—
I who am warm,
Who never yet have lacked a sheltering home.
In dull alarm
The dispossessed of hut and farm
Aimless and "transient" roam.

I listen to the agony of God—
I who am strong,
With health, and love, and laughter in my soul.
I see a throng
Of stunted children reared in wrong,
And wish to make them whole.

I listen to the agony of God—
But know full well
That not until I share their bitter cry—
Earth's pain and hell—
Can God within my spirit dwell
To bring His kingdom nigh.

—Georgia Harkness. Used by permission of author.